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Key: Russia
John STENNIS

Prudence is a Cuban policy

The Senate Preparedness subcommittee in its interim report on Cuba has fallen into a familiar pit.

Like other critics of Cuban policy, the committee and its chairman, Senator John Stennis, have called for positive action to remove the Russians from Cuba without specifying what that action should be.

The subcommittee is also guilty, as other Cuba policy critics have been guilty, of basing their evaluation of the Cuban threat — "grave and ominous" — on hearsay rather than on fact. Indeed, the senators went to the extreme of denouncing the intelligence community for "a disinclination . . . to accept and believe the ominous portent" of information brought out of Cuba by anti-Castro refugees.

Of course the intelligence community is disinclined to accept hearsay as fact. Policy must be based on fact — not hearsay, especially in a world in which one false move by a major power could bring unprecedented disaster to all mankind. The job of the intelligence community is to give our policymakers the facts. Thank heaven the men in charge of policy have the sense to hold their fire until they have the facts and don't take "positive" action merely on the basis of tales some refugees have brought us, as the subcommittee seems to recommend.

This is not to say the Central Intelligence Agency is not open to question for its record on Cuba. On the whole, the subcommittee has been kinder to the CIA than the record deserves. This is because committee members centered their criticism on the evaluation of intelligence data, and they gallantly admit that in challenging judgments, they enjoy the advantages of hindsight. What should be challenged is the adequacy of our intelligence network which apparently had to depend on actual reports



'Aw, push it and see what happens!'

—Polner, Detroit News

graphs to confirm the eyewitness reports largely from refugees about a small, familiar country only 90 miles from our shores. If our sources of reliable facts about Cuba are so limited, how can we have any confidence at all that our policy makers are reliably informed about the vast and remote Soviet Union or other similarly inaccessible danger areas? After all, the speed of missiles being what they are, there is not really much to choose between two score intermediate range missiles in Cuba and a growing arsenal of hundreds of long range missiles hidden away in the vast Soviet hinterland.

The question raised by Cuba is not whether we have the means or the will to remove a hostile threat when we see it. The question is whether we have the intelligence eyes and ears to spot a threat in time.

A second, equally important question, raised by the subcommittee's intemperate call to action, is whether we have the forbearance to wait and look before we leap into what could be the third and last world war.